

German Socialist Equality Party certified to participate in Hesse state elections

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On November 30, the state election committee in Wiesbaden, Germany, officially confirmed the candidacy of the Socialist Equality Party (*Partei für Soziale Gleichheit*—PSG) for the Hesse state election due to take place on January 27. The PSG had submitted its state list of candidates within the prescribed period and had collected more than the 1,000 signatures necessary to support the party's candidacy.

The PSG is the German section of the Fourth International and stands for the building of a new workers' party on the basis of an international and socialist programme.

The PSG is the only party in this election campaign that seriously opposes the right-wing policies of the current state administration led by Prime Minister Roland Koch (Christian Democratic Union—CDU), and offers a genuine socialist and international alternative to the so-called “opposition” parties—i.e., the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Greens and the Left Party (also known as “The Left”).

A total of 17 parties and lists of candidates were certified at the meeting of the Election Committee. In addition to those parties that already have representation in the state parliament (the CDU, SPD, Greens and the free market Free Democratic Party), there are a number of right-wing and extreme-right parties, several organisations and groups specialising in specific issues, and The Left Party.

For the first time in recent history, the German Communist Party (*Deutsche Kommunistische Partei*—DKP) is not putting up candidates. A section of this organisation has already dissolved itself into The Left. The rest of the membership drew the consequences from the demoralised statement made by a party congress five years ago—which concluded, “socialism is not on the agenda”—and refrained from putting up a candidate. The Maoist German Marxist-Leninist Party (MLPD) is also not taking part in the Hesse election.

The far-right and extreme-right-wing parties participating include the Republicans, the German National Democratic Party (NPD), the Alliance for Germany (Popular vote) and the Civil Rights Movement Solidarity. Two other parties, the Free Voters Hesse and the Independent Citizen's Politics, declare they seek to directly represent the interests of the “citizen” against the omnipotent power of the major parties.

The candidacy of the Free Voters Hesse is surrounded with controversy. Two years ago, it was revealed that CDU Prime Minister Koch had sought to offer the party financial concessions

if it refrained from putting up candidates at a state level. Normally, the organisation only puts up candidates at a local level. Its target voters are from the conservative bourgeois camp, and the organisation is seen as a direct competitor to the CDU.

A series of other parties are standing that take up specific issues such as animal protection and the interests of the elderly and families, as well as organisations calling for new copyright laws and increased freedom of information.

The Hesse election is taking place against a background of growing social and political tensions.

According to statistics, Hesse is one of the wealthiest states in the country and home to Germany's finance centre, Frankfurt am Main. Many major German and international concerns and banks have their headquarters or subsidiaries in the city. At the same time, the state has a quarter of a million inhabitants who are dependent on inadequate Hartz IV payments or other forms of social welfare. In Frankfurt, a quarter of all children live in poverty, and the neighbouring municipality of Offenbach has the second highest level of debt in Germany.

The acting state prime minister, Roland Koch, is associated with the most right-wing section of the CDU and implements policies based on a strong state, neo-liberal economics, national chauvinism and an aggressive imperialist foreign policy. Since taking office, Koch has slashed 1 billion euros in subsidies for social projects in the state. At the same time, under the title “public-private partnership,” he is seeking to enforce the complete or partial privatisation of numerous state institutions.

One prominent example is the fate of the Goethe University in Frankfurt, which is to be transformed into an institution relying on sponsors' donations. The state treasury will be one of the sponsors, but it will be denied any role in the control or organisation of the university. The influx of capital from private donors will inevitably be reflected in the content of the research and teaching programmes at the university, which will be increasingly forced to orient towards the interests of big business and the university's sponsors.

Koch came to power in 1999 on the back of an anti-immigrant campaign directed against the right to dual-nationality. Today, his priority is to hunt down those in the state who lack valid residency permits in order to ruthlessly deport them back to their country of origin. On October 12, 2005, the state government even passed a decree that compels school principals and doctors to expose “illegal” foreigners, including school children. It is estimated that

there are about 5,000 children and young people living in the city of Frankfurt who lack adequate papers, cannot go to school, and live in fear of raids by the police at their places of low-paid work.

All of this is well publicised and has led to broad social discontent, which has taken the form of a series of protests, strikes and demonstrations. Nevertheless, according to polls, Koch and the CDU could well form the next government, although with a lesser majority, requiring the party to form a coalition administration.

The CDU relies heavily on the collaboration and desolate state of the SPD in Hesse. The SPD, which could rely on 50 percent of the vote in Hesse up until the end of the 1960s, is so bankrupt it was incapable of putting up its own candidate for the last mayoral elections in the state capital city of Wiesbaden. The SPD simply missed the deadlines for announcing its candidate.

The deeper cause of the SPD's decline, however, is the rejection of the party by broad social layers—in particular, long-time former SPD voters. There is widespread opposition to both the CDU and the SPD. Such mistrust is entirely justified. An SPD-led government would barely differ in any area of political or economic significance from the current Koch administration. The unity of the two parties on all essential questions is reflected in the fact that the SPD is involved in a coalition with the CDU at the federal level.

The situation for the SPD is not improved by the fact that its leading candidate, Andrea Ypsilanti, is often described as belonging to the party's "left." Most voters are not fooled and realise that Ypsilanti's left postures and superficial criticisms of social injustice are aimed at defending the core of the brutal social "reforms" introduced by the former federal SPD-Green coalition, led by Gerhard Schröder.

In addition, the traditional coalition partner of the SPD, the Green Party, is seeking to outdo the FDP in terms of right-wing policies. In 1982, Hesse was the first German state to have a coalition government including the Greens, led at that time by Joschka Fischer. Since then, the party has repeatedly confirmed its subordination to the interests of big business and the banks and has played a major role in establishment politics. On a number of occasions recently, the party has attacked the SPD from the right and made clear that it too is ready for a coalition with the CDU. In Hesse's biggest city, Frankfurt, the Greens have formed a coalition municipal authority with the CDU in order to implement neo-liberal privatisation policies.

The Left, which is putting up candidates for a Hesse state election for the first time, emerged from the fusion of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS)—the successor organisation to the Stalinist ruling party in former East Germany—with the Election Alternative group (WASG), a collection of disillusioned trade union and social democrat bureaucrats from West Germany. While the party is often described in the media as a left alternative to the SPD, the reality is very different: the aim of The Left is to prevent broad layers of disillusioned workers, not only from turning their backs altogether on the SPD, but from rejecting reformism as a whole.

The Left openly acknowledges its adherence to capitalism and the defence of bourgeois property relations. Its left-sounding

rhetoric is not directed at providing the increasing social opposition with a socialist orientation. Instead, it is intent on heading off any opposition and preventing it from growing into a threat to the existing order.

The Left has emerged as a new factor for ensuring stability: instead of opening workers' eyes to the decline of the SPD, it throws the party a rescue ring. Its central slogan in the Hesse campaign, "Koch has to go," is nothing more than an offer to the SPD that The Left will provide it the support necessary to form a coalition government.

This was already clear following the founding congress of the Hessian Left in August. Instead of backing the long-time trade union and SPD functionary Dieter Hooge, who had been selected by the party leadership to be its leading candidate in Hesse, delegates chose the ex-DKP member Pit Metz, to indicate that they were *opposed* to any coalition with the SPD. Left Part leaders Gregor Gysi and Oscar Lafontaine, however, are adamantly in favour of such a coalition. In less than a week, pressure from the party leadership in Berlin led to Metz declaring his withdrawal as a leading candidate. He was promptly replaced by the non-affiliated veteran of German peace politics, Willi van Ooyen.

The real role of The Left has also been exposed in the course of the ongoing train drivers' strike. Prominent Left Party leaders have condemned the action taken by striking train drivers and openly lined up with the strike breakers in the Transnet trade union, backed by the Federation of German Trade Unions (DGB), the SPD, the railways executive and the government. In their determination to prevent any struggle by workers outside of control of the DGB bureaucracy, they have now decided to stab the train drivers in the back.

The role of The Left underlines the urgency of constructing a new workers' party, based on a socialist perspective and internationalism, that is completely independent of the old bureaucracies. This is precisely the aim of the intervention by the Socialist Equality Party in the Hesse election. Over the next several weeks, the PSG will undertake an energetic campaign to distribute and encourage discussion over our political programme and perspectives. The PSG calls upon all WSWs readers to vote for our candidates, follow the work of our campaign on the *World Socialist Web Site*, and assist in any way they can.



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